

Bureau of Parks and Lands  
**Seboomook Unit Management Plan**  
**Focus Meeting – Access and Roads**  
Greenville Community House  
October 12, 2004  
6:00 – 9:00 PM

**Meeting Notes**

Welcome and Introductions - Dave Soucy, Director, Bureau of Parks and Lands

*Purpose of Meeting:* to expand participants' understanding of the road maintenance and access issues related to the Seboomook Unit lands, and to begin a constructive dialogue with the participants about potential solutions to these issues.

*Bureau of Parks and Lands staff introductions:*

Ralph Knoll – Deputy Director, Bureau of Parks and Lands  
Kathy Eickenberg – Plan Coordinator for Seboomook Unit Management Plan  
Peter Smith – Western Lands Regional Manager  
Cindy Bastey – Chief Planner  
Steve Spencer – Outdoor Recreation Specialist  
Stephen Richardson – Forest Engineer  
Matt LaRoche – Manager, Penobscot River Corridor

*Introduction of Drew Parkin as Facilitator for the meeting.*

**Informational Presentations**

Access Roads Serving the Seboomook Unit Properties: what roads does the Department own, and what are the maintenance issues and plans? – Peter Smith

Access to the Seboomook Unit:

- The state does not own any portion of the 20-mile Road or Rockwood Road; the deed specifies the boundary as a 50-foot offset from the road centerline.
- The state does not own any portion of the Golden Road; the deed specifies the boundary as a 120-foot offset from the road centerline.
- The state does not own the road to Canada Falls Dam; or the road from Pittston farm to the Golden Road.
- However, the state has secured access rights for use by the public of the above mentioned roads that lie within the Seboomook Unit and within the surrounding West Branch easement lands.
- The state does not have access rights at this time for the entirety of the 20-mile road, but is working to secure those rights from Plum Creek and other landowners.

Roads within the Seboomook Unit:

- The state owns the South Seboomook Road from the junction with the 20-mile road to the Seboomook Dam; the Roll dam road; and the road from Seboomook Dam to the Golden Road.
- The Bureau of Parks and Lands is determining what sections of the South Seboomook and Roll Dam roads need attention this fall to avoid serious problems in the spring. It will be developing a road maintenance plan to get these roads in overall good condition by next summer.
- The overall plan is to bring the major roads within the unit up to the standards applied to roads in other state reserved lands so that annual maintenance costs will be reasonable.
- If the Great Lakes Hydro license is renewed under the terms of a Settlement Agreement reached by a number of stakeholder parties, the Department will be receiving some funds for maintenance of the roads from GLHA on an annual basis, which will primarily be used in the spring on trouble spots on the South Seboomook Road, Canada Falls Road, and Road to Seboomook Dam and Roll Dam/Burbank campsites.

North Maine Woods – Finances – Al Cowperthwaite

Al Cowperthwaite, Director of the North Maine Woods Organization, presented information on the economics of the gate and fee system operated by the NMW organization. This nonprofit organization was formed to manage public recreational use on the privately and publicly held lands of the member landowners, which number 24, and are changing almost daily. It covers a 3.5 million acre area from Seboomook Lake westward to the Canadian border, eastward to Baxter State Park and north of Baxter nearly to Fort Kent and easterly to Ashland. Major points were:

- Day use fees collected are used to maintain the checkpoint gates (14 of them system-wide).
- Camping fees cover campsite maintenance (388 of them system-wide).
- Fees are not used for road maintenance; the landowners pay this cost.
- The Seboomook area was added to the system in the middle of 1999.
- A major benefit of having the gates and visitor registration is very little vandalism for the over 900 campowners and leaseholders in the NMW area. There are about 300 leases in the West Branch region.

See the attached handout for more information. Additional information related to current and historic visitation to the NMW will be provided at the next meeting.

State of Maine Interests in the North Maine Woods - Ralph Knoll

- The Maine Department of Conservation has a number of lands that are embedded in the NMW system –such as the Allagash Wilderness Waterway, the Penobscot River Corridor, and the Deboullie Unit. The Seboomook Unit became state property on Dec

31, 2003. The Department has three types of contracts with NMW, depending on the services provided for these units.

- The State is an ex officio member of NMW; it is an active but not a voting member.
- The Governor's new Task Force on Traditional Uses and Public Access to Lands in Maine will be addressing how to maintain traditional uses on private lands. A handout was provided on the new Task Force (attached).

**Public Comments on Road and Access Issues Related to the Seboomook Unit -  
Summary from August 31 and Oct 12 meetings and Written Submissions**

*Access To the Seboomook Unit (including Spencer Mountain, Baker Lake, St. John Ponds):*

- Access to unit is important to economy of the region.
- How will public be assured of continued access to these lands?
- Condition of the roads impedes access – especially the 20-mile road from the end of the county maintained section. Part of broader issue of changing management of roads under new landowners.
- NMW has worked to keep private lands and roads open to the public.
- Why didn't the state get guaranteed public access to the Seboomook Unit as part of the negotiations?
- Somerset County would maintain the 20-mile road if they had ownership of it. Will the state look into that?

*Road Access On the Seboomook Unit Lands*

- Condition of the roads is a problem for access to Seboomook Campground.
- Condition of the roads is a problem for access to West Branch, esp. Roll Dam
- Will this committee deal with closure of roads on the Seboomook Unit?
- Concern about possible loss of snowmobile trail on Big Spencer Mountain.
- There should be a road management plan that addresses short term goals and long term goals.
- The Cut-off road needs to be repaired and put back into use, for convenience and safety. The intersection of the 20 mile and South Seboomook Road is too sharp and unsafe, especially if there is any hauling of wood on these roads.

*“North Maine Woods” Management of Access to the Seboomook Unit*

- NMW fees
  - Fees are too high and discourage use
  - Non-resident fees too high. Is discriminatory.
  - Per person fee is too much – should be per car.
  - Should have a sticker system for camp owners, landowners, and business owners.
  - Need to understand what costs these fees cover.
  - Condition of roads hasn't improved with higher fees.
  - Desire of local businesses affected by fees to have some role in determining fees.
  - Need for better communication with affected local businesses about changes in fees and policies.

- If landowners get a tax break with the tree-growth tax law, they owe the public reasonable access in return. *[DOC Note: there is no provision in the tree-growth tax law related to public access.]*
- If a camplot owner pays property taxes, why should they pay to access their property? And a day use fee for every day they spend there? Why should their guests have to pay to visit them on their property?
- Why is there a limit on the number of seasonal passes for landowners and leaseholders and their guests?
- Why should a guest of a landowner or leaseholder that travels to visit them in an RV have to pay camping fees if they stay on their host's property?
- Why should a local resident have to pay a fee to visit a relative that lives in the NMW?
- Someone who rents a site at Seboomook Campground seasonally pays the state 7% tax on the rental. They should not be charged to use state lands.
- High fees mean less use, and when people chose to go some other area, like New Hampshire, the state loses revenue – in retail sales, state tolls to get to the area, gas, lodging, guiding, dining. Certainly local businesses lose business even if visitors go elsewhere in Maine.
- Pittston Farm and Seboomook Campground have lost business because of the gates.
- High fees hit the lower middle income users and retired folks hardest, and they tend to be the traditional users of this area, and account for more of the total use than folks who can afford the fees.
- Gate system
  - As security - has benefits – registration deters vandalism.
  - Increased use in winter, without security gates could mean increased vandalism.
  - Need for courteous gatekeepers.
  - Information provided at the gate is inconsistent, incorrect at times, and hurts local businesses. They don't know the regulations; they have misrepresented fees at Seboomook Campground.
  - People are sometimes overcharged. Gate attendants don't charge the right fee.
  - Camp owners should not have to stop each time at the gate.
  - Gatekeepers aren't giving out promotional materials left with them for Seboomook Campground.
  - Gatekeepers are reluctant to allow the \$1 fee for a 4 hour visit to a local businesses (especially for dinner at Pittston Farm) if the visitor comes in one checkpoint and choses to go out another.
  - State ownership provides opportunity for change in NMW gate system similar to Nahmakanta.
  - Worry that if you get rid of the gates, the costs for the services they provide will end up being covered by Greenville taxpayers.
  - Campowners on Ragged Lake want to have a say in whether gates are kept or not.

*“North Maine Woods” Role Re Campsite Management on State Lands*

- Taxpayers paid for these lands and shouldn't have to pay high fees to use them.
- How does the state contract for services with NMW for campsite maintenance? Is there a competitive bid process? Shouldn't others be able to bid for this work?

- If NMW would withdraw from the Seboomook lands, what would it cost the state to maintain the campsites?
- One person said the campsites the state manages around the Telos area were better maintained than the campsites in the Seboomook area. *[DOC Note: NMW maintains the campsites in the Telos area, not the state.]*

#### *Uses Prohibited by the NMW System*

- People that arrive at the gate with bicycles on their way to Seboomook Campground have their bicycles confiscated. This discourages use of this campground.
- The system does not allow bicycles, horses, or ATV's. It is too restrictive.
- If the state were to eliminate the gates and pull out of NMW, it would first have to address how to manage ATV use. There are state programs supporting ATV trails and clubs; what makes the best sense for managing such uses on the Seboomook Unit hasn't been determined yet; that's part of developing the unit management plan. If the state had pulled the gates without a plan for managing ATV's, there would be all sorts of problems with unauthorized ATV use and no one would be happy with the outcome.

### **Discussion – Opportunities and Options**

The questions posed for the group to consider were:

- There will be costs for managing public use on the Seboomook lands. A question is how much management is necessary?
- Should there be gates controlling access to the Seboomook lands? What is the value of having gates; what do you lose if you don't have gates?
- What are the functions of the gates overall, and relative to the Seboomook lands, and can these functions be provided in another way? How would you pay for it?

Discussion centered on two broad options for changing the current gate and fee system for access to the Seboomook Unit:

(1) Retain the gates, but improve service and adjust the fees. Comments included:

- Gates have an important role for security, and the landowners do not want unfettered public use of their lands. We need to retain a viable NMW organization in order to keep public recreation opportunities on private land throughout the north woods.
- There should be no fees to visit the businesses inside the gates (such as Seboomook Campground, Pittston Farm, and Raymond's Store).
- There should be no fees for people staying at a leaseholder's, campowner's, or commercial sporting camp or campground.
- There should be no fees for campowners to get to their properties.
- There should only be a charge for campsite users.
- A toll (per axel, not per person) for use of the private roads might be reasonable.
- There could be a validation system whereby anyone who visits or stays at a business establishment such as Pittston Farm or Seboomook Campground gets a reduced fee.

- Lower costs for gates by using University of Maine students; hire local residents. Don't exclude young people for gatekeepers.
  - There should be no day-use fee for visiting state lands.
  - Gatekeepers need to be trained better to administer fees consistently and provide accurate information.
  - When people are overcharged at the gate they should be able to get a refund at the gate, not have to write to NMW to get as refund. People don't bother to do that, they just don't come back.
- (2) Eliminate the gates and provide the services of the gates in other ways. Comments included
- Look into whether the state could maintain the campsites more economically than NMW.
  - We need to think about what functions the gates provide, and can those functions be provided better somehow else? Vision of regional gateway communities that provide information on recreation opportunities, local businesses; and provide required training on leave-no-trace camping; provide needed permits, etc. Bring the gate functions down to Greenville to a regional tourism and recreation center.
  - Look for creative ways to provide and fund the functions of the gates - aim to get the costs down to around \$500,000 for the whole system. Then look for ways to fund this amount other than with fees.
  - Move the gates so that the Seboomook Unit lands, Pittston Farm and Seboomook Campground can be accessed without a gate fee.

### **Next Steps**

It was decided that another meeting would be held to continue the dialogue about possible solutions.

An advisory committee for the overall plan preparation will be formed at a later date.